Vice President's Speech

The Vice President At Technology for a Sustainable Future

President's Council on Sustainable Development

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Remarks as delivered

We're very proud that Chattanooga is an environmental success story, not only for the United States, but for the world. If you'll allow me a brief commercial to some of these Fortune 500 CEO's represented here, you tell your colleagues that any company looking for a place to locate that is deeply committed to sustainable development and an extraordinarily high quality of life for the men and women that work in the company, Chattanooga is the place to come. Now, you'll think that I'm just playing to the home town audience here, but it happens to be true. In 1969, Chattanooga had, perhaps, the worst air pollution in the country. You've probably heard some of the stories about what it was like. But little more than two decades later - by Earth Day 1990 - Chattanooga was declared the best turn-around story in the United States, due to a lot of hard work, due to it's fleet of electric buses and the pioneering work of Chattanooga's Electric Transit Vehicle Institute.

Last year, when I went to Bolivia, I talked to some leaders in La Paz worried about what to do about their air pollution there, and they wanted to know about Chattanooga's success story. And, indeed, the accomplishments have attracted worldwide attention. And rightly so, because its people have proven that - with community involvement and support - sustainable development is not only possible, and practical, but is the blueprint for the future. I met with many members of the commission earlier at a working session before we started the formal session, and I said to them that the formula on which the President's Council on sustainable development is based is really the same formula at heart that Chattanooga used. The business community , the environmental community, the public interest community, the leaders of the governmental organizations, the citizen's groups, right down to the neighborhood level, educators, foundations, philanthropists, every part of the community... get them together, and develop a shared vision of how we can promote progress and sustainable development on terms that, not only don't diminish the future, but enhance the future. Terms that not only don't diminish the environment that we leave to our children, but terms that improve it and make it better. That's what Chattanooga has done.

The plans to develop a zero-emissions industrial park downtown, and elsewhere in the community is an inspiring vision that takes it one step further. The work that's been done on recycling, the Tennessee aquarium, which is such a fabulous success, the river walk, the green-way network, the conservation program for the Tennessee river gorge, all of these are examples of what can happen. And they are especially important for this council because it's the kind of transformation that needs to take place in our country as a whole, and in the rest of the world. We're about the business of trying to make that possible. So it's great to be able to learn from Chattanooga.

One place to start the lessons is by looking at your vision 2000 process, and your revision initiative. You have to start with that shared vision. Really, that's what the President's council on sustainable development is all about. Writing the blueprint, creating the shared vision.

Sustainable development means that our citizens are protected from harm; the environment is restored; and all American's have the opportunity to realize their full potential and participate actively in building the future of the communities in which they and their families live. Therefore, we must:

- find better ways to reduce and dispose of waste;
- minimize the release of toxic substances and pesticides;
- clean up and protect our air, water, and soil;
- and, in doing these things, we will provide meaningful jobs and economic opportunity for all Americans

Our nation has the potential to lead the way toward a sustainable future - because our greatest natural resources are the initiative, ingenuity, and dedication of the American people. With the strength of our Democratic institutions and a free market system, we can, and will, make sustainable development a reality.

Again, Chattanooga is a good place to start. In 1984, Elanore Cooper, who was serving as Executive Director of Chattanooga Venture and as Vice President of the Lyndhurst Foundation, worked with the people of Chattanooga to conduct the first planning process of its kind in the country: It led to the development and implementation of Chattanooga's Vision 2000, that I mentioned before. I want to come back to it because based on citizens' consensus, the program led not only to an invigorated spirit of community, and broad based community planning - it also led to more tangible results: more than $793 million of investment within the community.

A lot of that investment is truly innovative. Around the country, council members and many others - such as Kodak, 3M, Union Carbide, and AT&T - are actively working to develop technologies that are safe for the environment and good for business and jobs. The number of companies that conduct voluntary environmental audits each year continues to grow. And, each year, these firms find that by Òdoing the right thingÓ environmentally, they can actually improve their competitiveness: environmentally sound processes and products make good business sense. That's not just a hopeful assertion, it's based on a fundamental truth.

Waste that hurts the environment is also economic waste that hurts productivity. And since economic waste that hurts productivity is sometimes hard to recognize, one way you can find it is looking for its trail, the same way a hunter finds a bear in the woods. You look for the trail of the waste. The trail that's often the easiest to follow is the pollution, the activities that harm the environment. When there is a sincere all-out commitment to eliminate that harm to the environment, there is almost always a bonus in the form of enhanced productivity, the discovery of new, better, more efficient ways of accomplishing what needs to be done and a renewed enlarged sense of commitment on the part of the employees in that organization. They are suddenly part of something that is larger and more important, they can go home and tell their families they are proud to be part of. There is a renewed sense of corporate responsibility around the country that is truly encouraging.

It's time, too, because for too long, we have resorted to remediation and cleanup after the fact, instead of anticipating and preventing the problems in the first place. The Federal government has not always been helpful. We can all remember times when administrations resisted environmental enforcement, citing an assertive, but false, trade-off between jobs and the environment. And we can all remember times when Congress would then respond by prescribing overly specific actions or technologies trying to achieve the environmental standards that the American people want... clean water, clean air. Too often, the result was overly cumbersome rules that micromanaged and inhibited technological advancement. And the pendulum would just swing from the extreme right to the extreme left and progress was hurt in the process. We tax labor

and capital, but do not fully take into account the use of our natural resources or the degradation of our environment. Frequently, if we don't pay attention to what we are doing, and make special efforts to take it into account, we won't see it naturally reflected on the balance sheet. Extra efforts are needed but the way we go about it is critically important.

We've been spending too much time in the courtroom. We need to spend more time developing creative and workable solutions to the problems we face. We must develop policies that reward creativity. We must encourage and foster innovative partnerships. We must continue to set strong environmental standards and ensure that those standards are enforced; however, we must at the same time, develop more effective and less adversarial approaches for achieving those high standards. That means charting our course towards sustainable development - and developing strategic policies that allow us to reach those goals as quickly, and efficiently, and justly as possible. We must pursue the rapid creation of environmentally appropriate technologies - especially in fields like energy, transportation, agriculture, building construction, and manufacturing.

With some new voices in Washington asserting that we need to roll back environmental protections, the roll of this council is made even more important. Because not all the new voices believe that at all. A lot of them just believe that government needs to get it, and do the job correctly. Don't roll back protections... reform, yes, but roll back, no. Clearly our task is to reform government without sacrificing health and the environment - or our children's future. It is not to defend the old system. And it is not to, reflexively , jump on a bandwagon seeking to repeal it, or eliminate it. At first glance, many people find that bandwagon appealing - why not go back to the days before environmental regulation? Back to, say, 1969.

Well, yearning for the smoke and smog of 1969 is the wrong response -- and you've got an awful lot of people right here in Chattanooga that you can ask to tell you the reason why. And if the country takes that path today, you can be certain that the pendulum will swing around again tomorrow - in an equally damaging manner. That's the wrong approach for business. And the wrong approach for America.

The right approach is the PCSD's approach - to stake out a bold new way of thinking.

The very nature of the Council - with representatives form government, industry, NGO's, civil rights and labor organizations, and community groups - will make it possible for you to develop innovative, bold, workable ideas for reform. Ideas not guided by ideology, but by common sense. Inspired not by narrow self interest, but by broad common purpose. As a group, you understand the value of collaboration and partnerships in achieving our long-term goals for a sustainable future.

The challenges of the future require us to establish strong partnerships among industry, government agencies, and the non-governmental community. We are well on our way.

Motorola and the Department of Energy, for example, are working together to develop a process that entirely eliminates the need to use cleaning solvents when manufacturing printed wire boards.

If this process is adopted by the electronics industry, an estimated 11,000 tons of ozone-depleting emissions and 19 trillion BTUs of energy will be conserved. And the industry will be more competitive at the same time.

Another good example is The Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles, or PNGV. This is coordinated through the National Science and Technology Council and involves a number of Federal agencies.

One goal is to achieve a three times increase in fuel efficiency with the same or better performance, at the same or better prices, compared to current vehicles. We are all excited by the developments and we'll hear more about it later this morning.

Another key to our technological success will be the efficient coordination of Federal science and technology research and development. In November 1993, President Clinton established the National Science and Technology Council. The council has developed a comprehensive strategy to ensure that Federal research and development are well coordinated and directed to the long-term needs of the public and private sectors.

Information technologies will also play a major role in the years ahead: as will continue to build on our national and global information infrastructure. We have created the Global Network for Environmental Technology (GNET), an electronic information network, to encourage collaboration and help make the link between new technologies and markets. I am pleased to announce that GNET will soon be available to members of the Council to facilitate an on-going discussion, on-line, about sustainable development.

Our new program called Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment, or the GLOBE program, will electronically link scientists and school age children around the world, including school children here, and Chattanooga. GLOBE will encourage students to take measurement of the environment and share their findings with other students around the world and, together, create an image of the globe each day.

Last July, we released the report ÒTechnology for a Sustainable Future,Ó which lays out the key issues associated with the advancement of environmental technology, an enterprise that is creating jobs here in Chattanooga and elsewhere in Tennessee and Oakridge, for example. We asked the National Science and Technology Council to hold a series of workshops around the Nation. With individuals from industry, academia, NGO's, and state and local governments, those workshops laid the groundwork for the White House Conference on Environmental Technology; and I know that many of you were involved in that conference.

There, we announced the new Rapid Commercialization Initiative (RCI) to ensure that good ideas for environmental solutions reach the marketplace quickly. In the spirit of reinventing government, RCI isn't a new spending program, but rather a way of making the government work better. It will increase the availability of federal sites for technology demonstration and testing and work with the states to streamline the permit process. We should begin to see initial benefits of RCI in the very near future.

That entire conference was inspirational, and the large number ideas presented by the participants there, was tremendously valuable. The insights we gained are already helping us to develop a Federal strategy for environmental technologies; a strategy will be released by Earth Day of this year.

There is something for everyone in environmental technologies:

- For government, here is an opportunity to develop strategies that foster technological advancement and help us to achieve and help to achieve our nation's goals more effectively.

- For industry, there is an opportunity to develop processes and products that both protect the environment and improve economic performance.

- For the environmental community, there are environmental technologies that can ensure a healthy environment and an alternative to the all-too-familiar adversarial relationships with industry.

So, I think it's appropriate the Council is focusing on this subject here today. Technology is going to be one of the keys to long term economic growth and environmental health. As I mentioned before, the many experienced engineers, outstanding academic institutions, and innovative firms that are involved in this work, represent tremendous national resources. We should take full advantage of these extraordinary capabilities.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I couldn't be prouder that this meeting is taking place here, and in closing, I want to

urge you to be creative and bold as you develop goals and policy recommendations over the next few months. We can create a sustainable future that benefits our people both with better jobs and more jobs and a cleaner, more sustainable environmental future. Let's get down to work.

Thank you very much.

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